

## Dean Nesbitt: a modern renaissance man

Dean Nesbitt is described as "a modern renaissance man with interests in music, painting, writing, business and the outdoor life . . . a husband and father, pianist, composer, self-taught painter, author and lawyer."

Nesbitt has a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Civil Law, both from McGill University, he's a Member of the Bar of Quebec and The Law Society of Alberta, a Member of the Canadian Bar Association, a Certificate, Owner-President Management Program, Harvard Business School, not the normal education and qualifications of a songwriter/performer, who, by the way doesn't read music. Add to that past and present directorships of 15 or more corporations, educational, hospital, church and other charitable organizations, and one might ask why would anyone want to enter the stressful world of a songwriter/performer, and why instrumental music?

"I guess it's what I do . . . I love instrumental music," counters Nesbitt, who recently released, *Castaway*, his third album of instrumental music. He continues, "Years ago, I remember reading about a woman who wrote a book who said 'I wrote this book because I wanted to read it.' So, I guess I would say the same about this recording."

Nesbitt plays keyboards (piano, synthesizer, MIDI) by ear. In 1979 when he was living in Montreal, Nesbitt was doing a lot of work with the blind. "My favourite keys are the black or the raised notes. Because of the analogy of the raised keys to Braille, I thought I would be able to teach piano to blind people because they could always find, by the raised keys, the starting chord."

Nesbitt became quite involved with the blind organization, and it was suggested that he produce an album to raise money for the organization. That album was appropriately titled *On The Black Keys and By Ear*. The album

artwork featured a painting by Nesbitt, who happens to be a self-taught painter.

Nesbitt is not visually challenged. "I thought that would be one of the worst afflictions and that's how I got involved in the first place."

Nesbitt recalls that his parents gave him piano lessons at age seven, and perhaps unknowingly offers a bit of advice for parents. "I still have a piece of music from them saying 'please don't play it over for Dean because he just does it by ear and doesn't read this.' They realized that I just wasn't interested in that route for me and I attribute my parents to my still playing today. I think if they had forced it, I might have lost interest, possibly."

To keep it legal, Nesbitt hired a copyright student to print the music so he would have the printed music available for both his first and his second record, *Ocean Rain*, a commercial album released in 1980.

Nesbitt says "I always have a tune in my head somewhere." He recalls that *All That I Love*, a track on his new album, "the song that started it all, was literally inspired by a call from out of the country, from a member of my family, and families are important to me, so after the call I had the basics for that tune, sat down at the piano and developed it further."

*Castaway*, the title track came about through a friend of his who owns *Castaway Fishing Expeditions* in Toronto who took Nesbitt on a fishing trip. "It was early in the morning and that amazing quiet and the sound of the water and the Loons inspired that tune."

Interesting too is how Nesbitt organized his recording sessions which were recorded at various studios in Toronto. Not having charts for his session musicians, his arranger David Nelson printed out charts on the computer which he was able to give to the musicians who comprised oboist and English horn player Clare Scholtz,

Demo Cates on soprano and alto saxophones, bassist Lionel Williams, drummer Bob Sibony, and Nelson who also provided some lead keyboard work.

Most of the recording was done at David Nelson's studio, *Orchestral Illusions*. "For *All That I Love*, we needed a concert grand piano, so went around the corner to *McClear Pathé*." Number 9 Sound Studios were used to lay down the drum and bass tracks.

It took two years to record *Castaway*. "I wrote

*All That I Love* in the summer of '96, and there was a little hiatus until I got my executive producer (Gene Evans) and so forth . . . it was over a two year period."

Nesbitt doesn't perform on the concert hall circuit, but he does perform on occasion. He recalls that in 1978 when he was performing as a solo keyboardist in a resort in Switzerland, he met Greta Garbo. "She was in the hotel and requested I play a few of her favourite songs. 'I was able to play them for her, which was kind of fun, and I joined her at her table afterwards for an interesting conversation.'"

Continuing to sing the praises of instrumental music, Nesbitt suggests this type of music is what people "like to listen to at home and relax to in the home environment, rather than going out to see it

performed." He credits publicist Jane Harbury for gaining the ear of radio programmers.

Surprisingly, radio has found *Castaway* to be radio friendly, with several tracks being aired at various radio stations across Canada. The album is released on the *Sagittarius* label and is available through 1-800-JOE-RADIO and at Toronto's *Song & Script* and HMV's superstore at 333 Yonge Street. Harbury can be contacted at 416-466-5020, fax 416-466-3424.